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SUBJECT: BAGHDAD: MILITANTS TAKE OVER WHERE GOVERNMENT FAILS

REF: A. BAGHDAD 1866
[1](#)B. BAGHDAD 2447
[1](#)C. BAGHDAD 2448
[1](#)D. BAGHDAD 1536
[1](#)E. BAGHDAD 1537
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[1](#)I. BAGHDAD 2317
[1](#)J. BAGHDAD 2318

Classified By: Deputy Political Counselor Robert Gilchrist for reasons
1.4 (b,d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Militant groups in Baghdad employ a complex mixture of violent and non-violent tactics to win control of the political prerogatives usually reserved for civilian governance institutions, including the delivery of essential services, the distribution of city resources, the collection of local revenue, and the control of political allegiance. In assuming these roles, an array of militant-affiliated administrative entities in Baghdad comprise an alternative, extra-legal government that outperforms legitimate institutions in the majority of the city's 105 neighborhoods. This parallel government exacerbates and capitalizes on weaknesses in the city's nascent democratic institutions, de-legitimizing and emasculating the Government of Iraq (GoI). This cable is the first in a series on extra-legal government in Baghdad, drawing on analysis and information from Baghdad PRT and the six Baghdad EPRTs. END SUMMARY.

THUGS BECOME POLITICIANS: FILLING THE GOVERNANCE VACUUM

[1](#)2. (C) Militant groups in Baghdad perpetually produce chaos and then claim credit for re-establishing order. Rather than merely compensating for a failing government, militants continue to play a major role in creating the governance vacuum that they often subsequently fill. They assassinate local council members, intimidate city engineers, and destroy vital infrastructure. In the face of a calculated and overwhelming onslaught, the legal government often either fails to function or, when it does function, furthers the agenda of the local militants who have hijacked its officials and resources. Militant agendas tend to be sectarian and criminal, and pose a major impediment to the establishment of security and stability in Baghdad.

[1](#)3. (C) The local leaders currently administering many Baghdad neighborhoods form what may be deemed the extra-legal governance wing of four militia and terrorist groups, broadly construed, including Jaysh Al-Mahdi (JAM), Badr Corps (Badr), Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), and the splinter groups that together comprise the Sunni insurgency. Other groups supported by elements of the former regime and by the Iranian Republican Guard Corps-Qods Force also sometimes assume governance roles in areas they dominate. These groups differ from non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and from criminal

gangs. Instead of just offering services and resources to supplement what the state provides, as NGOs typically do, they include a militant element that tries to maintain a monopoly on violence. Rather than merely enjoying the public goods a state provides while breaking the state's laws, as criminal gangs typically do, they aim to reap the power and control that comes from providing public goods. They seek, in effect, to displace and replace the state.

14. (C) Taken together, the violent and non-violent dimensions of militant groups assume a parastatal form, comprising an alternative, extra-legal government in Baghdad.

Disjointed and in conflict, the governance entities affiliated with these groups differ dramatically in their aims and organizational capacity. Nonetheless, they all employ a similar, discernible pattern in converting the physical domination of a neighborhood into political and administrative control. Although not always coordinated or planned internally within each group, the behavior of militants across Baghdad amounts to an effective, tactical approach to seizing and maintaining control of local government in Iraq's capital city. (NOTE: Post will report on seven of these tactics Septel. END NOTE.)

MILITANTS CONTINUE TO SEIZE NEW AREAS

15. (C) In scores of conversations with Poloffs, PRToffs, and EPRToffs, as well as in surveys and focus groups conducted by MNF-I and NGOs, the majority of Baghdad residents indicate a strong preference for legitimate government instead of the extra-legal institutions operated by militias, insurgents and AQI. Locals also report that Coalition Forces (CF) and the

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Iraqi Army (IA) have largely cleared militants from some neighborhoods, including key central areas around Haifa Street and Palestine Street. In some city districts, particularly those with Sunni-dominated neighborhoods, such as Mansour and Rashid, local residents have worked with CF and IA to fight the terrorists -- particularly AQI -- that previously controlled their neighborhoods (Reftels A, B and C).

16. (C) Despite their recent defeat or weakening in some areas, extra-legal organizations established by armed militants continue to function as quasi-state entities in the majority of Baghdad's neighborhoods. They also continue to seize political control in areas previously free from their direct influence. Locals report, for example, that one month ago JAM took control of most of the Muthana-Zayuna neighborhood in 9 Nissan (New Baghdad) district. In another instance, according to contacts in one section of Palestine Street, JAM leaders tried recently to open an office in their local Husseiniya (Shia mosque); residents claim to have convinced them to stay out by arguing that their visible presence would invite attack from AQI.

DIFFERENT GROUPS, DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO POWER

17. (C) JAM and Badr, which dominate Shia areas of Baghdad, have adopted pragmatic approaches to seize and maintain control of local neighborhoods. JAM in particular has focused on providing essential services to local residents through its affiliated governance organization, the Office of the Martyr Sadr (OMS). AQI leaders, by contrast, have tended to employ a more ideological approach: they have reportedly prioritized controlling the religious practices and social mores of local residents over connecting them to essential services. Their overbearing attempt to win souls instead of hearts and minds has proved remarkably counter-productive, as locals have turned against them in various part of the city. Sunni insurgents also appear to have neglected the delivery

of services and resources to the areas that they control, concentrating their efforts instead on attacking CF and IA.

¶8. (C) JAM and Badr seek to maximize their control of both illegitimate and legitimate governance institutions. The legally established political parties associated with JAM (the Sadrist Movement) and Badr (the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI), formerly the Supreme Council of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq) developed a distinct advantage over their rival Sunni militants in accessing city services following provincial elections (January 2005) and national elections (December 2005), during which ISCI, the Sadrists, and their allies won control of provincial and national institutions. They have come to dominate the Baghdad Provincial Council (PC) and key government ministries, including the Ministry of Interior (ISCI) and the Ministry of Health (still Sadrist-dominated, despite the party's withdrawal from the Government). As a result, the PC and the ministries that serve Baghdad have generally distributed resources, services and jobs along sectarian lines, favoring Shia over Sunni areas. As one local Sunni contact explained, "Shia can come to a government office with 1,000 names of police recruits, and the government will sign them up. Sunnis can't do this."

JAM-OMS HAS COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE IN BAGHDAD

¶9. (C) JAM and its affiliated governance institution, OMS, have focused more extensively than have any of its rivals on consolidating local control throughout Baghdad. Although Badr-ISCI groups control some Baghdad neighborhoods, particularly in Khadhamiya and Karada, JAM-OMS affiliates have achieved dominance in 9 Nissan, Sadr City, Rusafa, northern Adhamiya, most of Khadamiya and west Rashid, and parts of Karada. Badr Corps has reportedly existed the longest, forming in exile and returning to Iraq during CF combat operations in February 2003, but JAM-OMS has organized itself into the most comprehensive and effective extra-legal government in Baghdad, despite the formation of rogue and splinter groups beyond the organization's control. OMS contains "committees" that resemble government departments, including those that focus on economic, social and educational issues. Contacts report that these multi-level committees operate at the national level and, in Baghdad, at the provincial level. They also have satellite offices in each of Baghdad's nine central districts, and in many of Baghdad's 105 neighborhoods. OMS operates its biggest Baghdad office in Sadr City (Reftels D, E, F, and G). Although centrally controlled out of Najaf, operations in Baghdad reportedly earn OMS the majority of its revenues.

¶10. (C) Local contacts consistently report that Badr has a
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smaller local following in Baghdad than does JAM because Badr lacks the support in the Sadr City district that serves as a crucial popular base for JAM; Badr has a more elitist and less populist approach than does JAM; Badr has older leaders and older members; Abdal Aziz Al-Hakim has less name recognition than does Muqtadr Al-Sadr; and Badr leaders lived in exile during Saddam Hussein's reign, whereas Sadr and other JAM-OMS leaders stayed in Iraq. Most significantly among these various factors, Sadr City serves as the spiritual core and operational base of the Sadrist Movement, OMS, and JAM. It constitutes approximately 40 percent of Baghdad's total population. Locals characterize its spirit as young, energetic, and bent on reversing a history of disenfranchisement. One of the most populous districts in the Middle East, it contains thousands of unemployed and under-employed young men.

¶11. (C) Badr-ISCI's national leaders appear to have concentrated their efforts in the south of Iraq, and in filling government ministries, rather than in achieving control of Baghdad's neighborhoods. The Badr Corps, which

lacks a populous base of support in Baghdad, has reportedly focused on assassinating or capturing its enemies among former Baath Party members or rival Shia groups. In Baghdad, Badr has a local reputation for stealth and professionalism. In the words of a local contact in Sadr City, "Badr's militia has more quality, and Sadr's militia has more quantity." On balance, Badr-ISCI appears to have a complex relationship with JAM-OMS, which involves, at different times and in different places, both competition and cooperation (Reftel H).

¶12. (C) In contrast to JAM, insurgents and AQI continue either to neglect service-provision in the neighborhoods that they control, or to fail to attain the resources necessary to deliver services. Residents of Sunni-majority areas often complain that their leaders -- of both legal and extra-legal institutions -- have less access to services, fuel, markets, and weapons than do leaders of Shia-majority neighborhoods. (NOTE: As a result of this situation, EPRT leaders report that local Sunni leaders, following the launch of their fight against AQI, request help from Coalition Forces instead of the GoI when seeking to re-connect their neighborhoods to essential services. END NOTE.) Few mixed areas remain in Baghdad (Reftel I and J). The mixed areas that do remain continue to experience sectarian displacement, while others endure comparatively benign militant leaders, and a few remain largely clear of militants.

ALL POLITICS IS LOCAL, BUT ORGANIZATION MATTERS

¶13. (C) Militant groups in Baghdad and their associated governance institutions generally rely on locally-generated leaders, local members, local knowledge, and a local base of public support. Some extra-legal organizations, such as OMS, operate with delineated, hierarchical systems that mirror the legitimate local government's technical committee structure and its logistical links to a super-structure encompassing multiple city districts. Some of the Sunni insurgent groups in Baghdad, by contrast, have formal or informal ties to groups in other provinces, but lack logistical support in Baghdad outside of their neighborhoods. Still other groups never formally organize themselves, even within the neighborhoods where they maintain physical control. These groups carry out governance functions on an ad hoc basis by providing services and distributing resources whenever possible.

¶14. (C) Despite numerous differences in the structure of their organizations, all of the local leaders currently displacing the GoI are unelected, unrepresentative, and, most importantly for Iraqis, unaccountable. Local residents cannot appeal to a higher authority to redress their grievances. In this respect, leaders of Baghdad's extra-legal local institutions exhibit a hallmark of tyrannical regimes -- the arbitrary exercise of their authority. "No one ever investigates their crimes," a local contact said, "or just tells them to stop threatening people."

THE PARADOX OF MILITANT POWER -- NIMBLE GROUPS
ARE HARD TO CONTROL

¶15. (C) Membership in militant groups and their associated organizations does not often require training, skills or a complicated application procedure. Members must remain flexible, however, by disavowing their membership in some settings, while, at other times, asserting the authority that they derive from group membership. The same flexibility that makes militia members nimble, however, makes them difficult

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to control. When membership is hard to define, it is also hard to manage -- members often lack discipline and training.

Numerous local contacts report, for instance, that JAM has command-and-control problems in Baghdad. Thus local leaders who control governance functions often develop an ambivalent relationship to the violence that empowers the militants with whom they work. Some governance leaders distance themselves from the violence, relying on the leaders of their affiliated militant group to control their own cadres and to resist the intrusion of rival groups, Coalition Forces, or the Iraqi Army. Other leaders of extra-legal government serve in dual roles, as administrators and combat commanders. The rest of the leaders of Baghdad's extra-legal government fit somewhere between these two extremes.

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